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Friday, 13 April 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Meza-Cuadra	(Peru)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

Threats to international peace and security

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Threats to international peace and security

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to warmly welcome His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres, to whom I now give the floor.

The Secretary-General: The situation in the Middle East is in chaos to such an extent it has become a threat to international peace and security. The region is facing a true Gordian knot — different fault lines crossing each other and creating a highly volatile situation with risks of escalation, fragmentation and division as far as the eye can see, with profound regional and global ramifications. We see a multiplicity of divides.

The first is the memory of the Cold War. But, to be precise, it is more than a simple memory: the Cold War is back with a vengeance — but with a difference. The mechanisms and the safeguards to manage the risks of escalation that existed in the past no longer seem to be present.

Secondly, there is the Palestinian-Israeli divide.

Thirdly, there is the Sunni-Shia divide, evident from the Gulf to the Mediterranean. It is important to note that apparent religious divides are normally the result of political or geostrategic manipulation.

Finally, there is a wide range of different factors — from opposing attitudes in relation to the role of the Muslim Brotherhood or the status of the Kurds, to the dramatic threats to communities that have been living in the region for millenniums and are part of the rich diversity of Middle Eastern societies.

Those numerous divisions are reflected in a multiplicity of conflicts with different degrees of interconnection, several of which are clearly linked to the threat of global terrorism. Many forms of escalation are possible.

We see the wounds of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continuing to fester. The recent violence in Gaza resulted in many needless deaths and injuries. I repeat my call for an independent and transparent investigation into those incidents. I also appeal to those concerned to refrain from any act that could lead to further casualties, in particular any measures that could place civilians in harm's way. That tragedy underlines the urgency of revitalizing the peace process for a two-State solution that will allow Palestinians and Israelis to live side by side in peace in two democratic States within secure and recognized borders. I reaffirm the readiness of the United Nations to support those efforts.

In Yemen, we are witnessing the worst humanitarian disaster in today's world. There is only one pathway to ending the Yemeni conflict and to addressing the humanitarian crisis: a negotiated political settlement through inclusive intra-Yemeni dialogue. My Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, is doing everything possible to facilitate that political settlement. He will brief the Council next week.

In Libya, I encourage all parties to continue to work with my Special Representative, Ghassan Salamé, as he engages in the political process with a broad range of Libyan interlocutors across the country in order to implement the United Nations action plan. It is high time to end the Libyan conflict.

The case of Iraq demonstrates that progress is possible with concerted local, regional and global commitment. With the defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, having overcome the risk of fragmentation, the Government of Iraq must now focus on reconstruction, reforms and reconciliation. I hope that the upcoming elections will consolidate that progress.

At the recent Paris and Rome conferences, the international community reaffirmed its support for Lebanon's sovereignty, stability and State security institutions. It is absolutely essential to prevent a new Israel-Hizbullah conflict, which could inevitably result in many more victims and much greater destruction than the last war. I reiterate the critical importance to act on key principles and commitments on Lebanon, including the Security Council resolutions, such as resolution 1701 (2006), and the policy of disassociation. The dangers of the links to the Syrian conflict are

evident in the recent confrontations between Iran and Israel in Syria.

Syria today indeed represents the most serious threat to international peace and security. We see there confrontations and proxy wars, involving several national armies, a number of armed opposition groups, many national and international militia, foreign fighters from everywhere in the world and various terrorist organizations. From the beginning, we have witnessed systematic violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international law, in general, in utter disregard for the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

For eight long years, the people of Syria have endured suffering upon suffering. I reiterate that there is no military solution to the conflict. The solution must be political through the Geneva intra-Syrian talks, as stipulated in resolution 2254 (2015), and in line with the consistent efforts of my Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura. Syrians have lived through a litany of horrors: atrocity crimes, sieges, starvation, indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, the use of chemical weapons, forced displacement, sexual violence, torture, detention and enforced disappearances. The list goes on.

In a moment of hope, the Security Council adopted resolution 2401 (2018), demanding that all parties cease hostilities without delay for a durable humanitarian pause. Unfortunately, no such cessation of hostilities ever really took place. That is the bleak panorama of Syria today.

In that panorama, I am outraged by the continued reports of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. I reiterate my strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by any party to the conflict under any circumstances. Their use is abhorrent and a clear violation of international law. The seriousness of the recent allegations requires a thorough investigation, using impartial, independent and professional expertise.

In that regard, I reaffirm my full support for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its Fact-finding Mission in undertaking the required investigation into those allegations. The mission should be granted full access, without any restrictions or impediments, to perform its activities. I take note that the Syrian Government has requested that and is committed to facilitating it. The first OPCW team is already in Syria; a second team is expected today or tomorrow.

However, we need to go further. In a letter to the Council two days ago, I expressed, following the end of the mandate of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism,

> "my deep disappointment that the Security Council was unable to agree upon a dedicated mechanism to attribute responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria".

I want to repeat today that the norms against chemical weapons must be upheld. As I wrote in the same letter:

> "[e]nsuring accountability for a confirmed use of chemical weapons is our responsibility, not least to the victims of such attacks. A lack of accountability emboldens those who would use such weapons by providing them with the reassurance of impunity. This, in turn, further weakens the norm proscribing the use of chemical weapons and the international disarmament and non-proliferation architecture as a whole. I urge all Member States to act responsibly in these dangerous circumstances;
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> "I appeal to the Security Council to fulfil its duties and not to give up on efforts to agree upon a dedicated, impartial, objective and independent mechanism for attributing responsibility with regard to the use of chemical weapons. I stand ready to support such efforts."

The increasing tensions and the inability to reach a compromise in the establishment of an accountability mechanism threaten to lead to a full-blown military escalation. In my contacts with the members of the Security Council, particularly the permanent members, I have reiterated my deep concerns about the risks of the current impasse and stressed the need to prevent the situation from spiralling out of control.

That is exactly the risk that we face today — that things spiral out of control. It is our common duty to stop it.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his valuable briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are greatful to the Secretary-General for his briefing. His participation, his assessments and his authoritative words about the situation that has developed are very significant. We agree with him that there are many wounds in the Middle East. However, most important, currently the deepest wound is the situation in Syria, insofar as any negative repercussions would have major global implications.

Two days ago, news of a threat by the United States to launch missile strikes against the Syrian Arab Republic ricocheted around the world. The Russian Federation was also warned to prepare for strikes. Let me point out that our military is in Syria at the invitation of its legitimate Government in order to combat international terrorism. We continue to see dangerous military preparations for an illegal act of force against a sovereign State in violation of the norms of international law. It is not just the use of force but even the threat of it that flies in the face of the Charter of the United Nations, and that is precisely what we are seeing in the most recent statements and actions of Washington and its allies. The bellicose rhetoric is being ratcheted up at every level, including at the very top. Additional forces and assets of the United States military and its allies are bearing down on the Syrian coast. It feels as though Washington is singlemindedly heading towards unleashing a military scenario against Syria. That cannot be permitted. Such developments would be fraught with terrible consequences for global security, especially considering that a Russian military contingent is deployed in Syria.

There are also those who have been observing these risky preparations with tacit approval, declaring that they understand Washington's motives or engaging in direct incitement, thereby becoming potential accomplices in an act of reckless military adventurism. There are people in the Security Council who love to talk about preventive diplomacy. Right now, for some reason, they are nowhere to be seen or heard. The guilty parties have been speedily identified not just before any investigation has been conducted but even before it has been established whether the incident in question took place at all, but evidently they must still be punished. Someone will have to answer for these unfortunate developments and for the previous interventions that have engulfed many countries in years of crisis with untold casualties.

Witness the recent experience of Iraq and Libya, which, among other things, shows that the attitude of America's leaders to the Security Council is largely one of convenience. They need it as cover for their Iraqi test tubes and Libyan no-fly zones. What they are presenting us with now is another virtual test tube, and an empty one. The reckless behaviour of the United States as it tramples on international law and State sovereignty is unworthy of its status as a permanent member of the Security Council, which presupposes the highest possible degree of responsibility and certainly not a right to sabre rattling, a right that is unknown in international law.

Why does the United States continue to torture the Middle East, provoking one conflict after another and pitting the States of the region against one another? Who will benefit from a potential strike against the Syrian military, which is taking the brunt of the fight against terrorism and achieving major victories in it? We know for sure that the ringleaders of the Syrian armed groups were given orders to launch an offensive after a possible military action. Is this latest wave of chaos really being unleashed just for that?

The excuse is the alleged use of toxic substances in the Syrian town of Douma on 7 April, for which there has been no reliable confirmation. Our specialists found no trace of the use of toxic substances. The residents of Douma know of no such attack. All the evidence of the alleged attack has been provided by anti-Government forces for whom this development is in their interests. We have good reason — indeed, we have information — leading us to believe that what took place was a provocation with the participation of various countries' intelligence services. We have been issuing warnings about this for a long time. It is a repeat of the Khan Shaykhun scenario in April of last year.

The Syrian Government, for which this is clearly the last thing it needs, has said that it was not involved and has sent a request for an immediate inspection by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) of the location of the alleged incident. It has offered security guarantees jointly with the Russian military. The mission is already getting started on its work in Syria and we hope that it will be able to conduct a truly independent and impartial investigation.

Only the Security Council has the authority at the international level to decide what measures to take and against whom in connection with the use of chemical

weapons in Syria. Russia will continue to work diligently and systematically to de-escalate the recent tensions in international relations. We proposed adopting a brief resolution in support of the OPCW inspection mission in Douma that the United States, Britain and France irresponsibly blocked, thereby demonstrating their lack of interest in an investigation. The only thing they care about is overthrowing the Syrian Government and, more broadly, deterring the Russian Federation. This has been clearly visible in other international and domestic political events built on unfounded hoaxes and conspiracy theories that always centre around the Russian Federation.

What is the United States trying to achieve? After many years of internecine strife in Syria, significant areas of the country have been stabilized. The political process is reviving and indicators of national reconciliation are emerging. The terrorists have been dealt a significant blow. We have never denied that the United States has also made a certain contribution to achieving that shared goal, but it has always kept certain types of terrorists in reserve for its fight against the so-called regime and for advancing its geopolitical priorities in the region.

My British colleague is always asking me what Russia is doing to implement resolution 2401 (2018). My answer is that my country is practically the only one that is doing anything about it. Over the course of the Astana process, peace has been restored in more than 2,500 towns and villages. That does not mean that they have become victims of the regime, as the United States calls it, merely that with the help of Russia and other guarantors they have established normal relations with the central authorities in Damascus. With the support of the United Nations, the Syrian National Dialogue Congress was held successfully in Sochi. How many towns and villages has the United States brought peace to? How many groups has it persuaded to join the ceasefire agreements?

In order to break the deadlock in the situation in eastern Ghouta after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), complex negotiations were conducted with the leaders of armed groups, with Russian assistance. The militias and their family members were safely evacuated from the district, and civilians were finally given the opportunity to shake off years of terror. Film of their genuine joy exists, but the Western media is not showing it. The United States does not care about the fate of the prisoners of the militias in eastern Ghouta who had been supporters of the Syrian Government. When they were bargaining with the Syrian authorities to exchange prisoners, the militias claimed that they were holding between 2,000 and 4,000 people. Now it turns out that there are far fewer. People died from harsh treatment and hard labour digging huge tunnels for their torturers.

Some members have grieved to see their bearded pilgrims setting off for Syria on free tourist tickets. They lost no opportunity to shriek from every street corner about the plight of the hundreds of thousands of people in besieged eastern Ghouta. Now those people need help in rebuilding normal lives, but these Council members have already lost interest because the area is under Government control. Now there will have to be unpleasant discussions about the blockade of Fo'ah and Kefraya. When was the last time a humanitarian convoy was there? When was the last time Council members even asked about it? Someone must answer for the coalition's destruction of Raqqa.

These are dangerous developments, with far-reaching ramifications for global security. In this instance, responsibility lies entirely with the United States and its allies. It is a pity that Old Europe continues to lose face. We call on the leaders of these States to immediately reconsider, return to the international legal fold and not to lead the world to the dangerous brink. We urgently need to find a peaceful way out through a collective effort. The Russian Federation is ready to cooperate equitably with all partners and to solve the problems that may arise through dialogue. We will continue to focus on finding a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Syria based on established international law. We will continue to work actively to that end, and we call on all our partners to do the same.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I started to listen to my Russian friend so as to respond to him, but instead I am truly in awe of his ability to say what he said with a straight face.

Today's meeting of the Security Council has been convened under truly strange circumstances. The Russian Federation has asked us to discuss what it calls unilateral threats related to Syria. What is strange is that Russia is ignoring the real threat to international peace and security that has brought us all here. It is ignoring its own unilateral responsibility for all of it. What we should discuss today is the use of deadly chemical weapons to murder innocent Syrian

civilians. That is one of the most blatant and grotesque violations of international law in the world today. It is a violation of all standards of morality. It violates the long-standing international consensus that chemical weapons represent a unique evil. Chlorine, mustard gas and other chemical weapons killed 90,000 people and injured more than 1 million during the First World War. In the history *Canada in the Great World War*, the Canadian soldier A.T. Hunter described it this way.

> "The gas cloud gathered itself like a wave and ponderously lapped over into the trenches. Then passive curiosity turned to active torment — a burning sensation in the head, red-hot needles in the lungs, the throat seized by a strangler. Many fell and died on the spot. The others, gasping, stumbling with faces contorted, hands widely gesticulating and uttering hoarse cries of pain, fled madly through the villages and farms and through the city itself, carrying panic to the remnants of the civilian population and filling the roads with fugitives of both sexes and all ages".

Chemical weapons did not produce the most casualties in the First World War, but they were the most feared. In the Second World War chemical weapons were employed on an industrial scale against civilians, resulting in the worst genocide in human history, which the United States recalled just yesterday on Holocaust Remembrance Day. That is what brings us here today. That is what chemical weapons are all about. That is why we must not stay silent in the face of the horrible use of chemical weapons in our own time.

The first response to all of this death and injury was the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which banned the use of chemical weapons and more. Later, in 1993, the Chemical Weapons Convention was signed. It obligates all of its parties to never under any circumstances

> "develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile or retain chemical weapons, or transfer, directly or indirectly, chemical weapons to anyone".

It also prohibits all parties from helping anyone to engage in such activities. The United States is a party to the Convention. Russia is a party to the Convention. Every country that is currently a member of the Security Council is a party to the Convention. Even the Al-Assad regime has pledged to abide by the Convention, so in theory all of us agree on the core principle at stake today. No country can by allowed to use chemical weapons with impunity. Now that we have established what we all agree on, let us ask ourselves what we should be condemning today. We should be discussing the actions that truly brought us to this moment in time. We should not be condemning the country or group of countries that might have the courage to stand up in defence of our common principle against the use of chemical weapons. Instead, we should be condemning the country that has unilaterally prevented the Security Council from upholding it.

Which member of the Council most exhibits unilateralism with regard to chemical weapons? It is Russia alone that has stopped at nothing to defend the Syrian regime's multiple instances of the use of chemical weapons. It is Russia alone that killed the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which enabled the world to ensure accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. It is Russia alone that has used its veto six times to prevent the condemnation of Al-Assad's use of chemical weapons. It is Russia alone that has used its veto 12 times to protect the Al-Assad regime. To make matters worse, it was Russia alone that agreed to be the guarantor of the removal of all chemical weapons in Syria. If Russia had lived up to its commitment, there would be no chemical weapons in Syria and we would not be here today. That is the Russian record of unilateralism. It is a record that has led to the trashing of all international standards against the use of chemical weapons. This meeting should not be about so-called unilateral threats, but rather about the multiple actions that Russia has taken to bring us to this point.

Our President has not yet made a decision about possible actions in Syria, but should the United States and its allies decide to act in Syria, it will be in defence of a principle on which we all agree. It will be in defence of a bedrock international norm that benefits all nations. Let us be clear. Al-Assad's most recent use of poison gas against the people of Douma was not his first, second, third or even forty-ninth use of chemical weapons. The United States estimates that Al-Assad has used chemical weapons in the Syrian war at least 50 times. Public estimates are as high as 200.

In the weeks after Al-Assad's sarin-gas attack last April, which killed nearly 100 people, including many children, the regime used chlorine gas at least once and possibly as many as three times in the same area. Last November, just as the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism expired, the regime again attacked its people with sarin in the Damascus suburbs.

In January, Al-Assad used at least four chlorine-filled rockets in Douma, and then he struck again last weekend. Thanks to Russia, there was no United Nations body to determine blame. But we know who did this; our allies know who did this. Russia can complain all it wants about fake news, but no one is buying its lies and its coverups. Russia was supposed to guarantee that Al-Assad would not use chemical weapons, and Russia did the opposite.

The world must not passively accept the use of chemical weapons after almost a century of their prohibition. Everything the United Nations stands for is being blatantly defied in Syria, with the help of a permanent member of the Council. All nations and all peoples will be harmed if we allow Al-Assad to normalize the use of chemical weapons. It is those who act to violate the prohibition of chemical weapons who deserve our condemnation. Those who act to defend it deserve our support. The United States and its allies will continue to stand up for truth, accountability, justice and an end to the use of chemical weapons.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing and deeply appreciate his tireless efforts on the issue of the Middle East and that of Syria.

The current situation in Syria is perilous. The country is at the crossroads of war and peace, and China is following the developments there with great concern. The possibility of an escalation of tensions worries us deeply. The pressing priority of the moment is to launch a comprehensive, objective and impartial investigation into the relevant incidents in order to arrive at authoritative conclusions.

China has consistently stood in favour of the peaceful settlement of disputes and opposed the routine use or threat of force in international relations. To take unilateral military action by circumventing the Security Council is inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and runs counter to the basic norms enshrined in international law and those governing international relations.

Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity must be fully respected. We call on the parties concerned to remain calm, exercise restraint, refrain from any move that could lead to further escalation of the situation and resolve the issue peacefully through consultation and dialogue. China is convinced that there can be no military solution to the Syrian issue; the only way out is a political settlement. China supports the United Nations in playing an active role in safeguarding the authority and standing of the Organization and its Security Council.

China calls on the international community to steadfastly continue its diplomatic efforts, tirelessly stay the course so as to settle the Syrian issue politically, give full play to the role of the United Nations as the main mediator, and resolve without delay the Syrian issue comprehensively, justly and adequately, in keeping with the provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The people of the world yearn for peace and oppose war. The situation in Syria has ramifications for peace and stability in the Middle East and the world at large, as well as for the credibility and authority of the Council. At this critical juncture, the Council must rightfully discharge its sacred responsibility emanating from the Charter of the United Nations; act in line with the dictates of our times; build unity and consensus and do its utmost to maintain peace; leave no stone unturned in its efforts to prevent war; and live up to the trust and expectations of the international community.

China is and has always been a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development and a defender of the international order. China stands ready to continue its unflagging efforts to safeguard peace and stability in the Middle East and the world at large, in a spirit of responsibility to history and to the peoples of the world.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

We are meeting today to address the threats to international peace and security that have arisen as a result of the situation in Syria, six days after the latest chemical-weapons carnage, on 7 April in Douma.

For seven years, the situation in Syria has without a doubt constituted a grave threat to international peace and security as defined in the Charter of the United Nations. The Security Council itself characterized this as such unanimously on 27 September 2013, when resolution 2118 (2013) was adopted in the wake of the appalling chemical-weapons attacks that had taken place in eastern Ghouta. The world then learned for the first time and with horror of the symptoms of large-scale chemical-weapons-related deaths in Syria.

To counter those who are seeking to sow confusion, going so far as to accuse the Syrian people of having gassed themselves; those who are suggesting conspiracy theories; those who are endeavouring methodically to destroy our mechanisms for action on chemical weapons in Syria, we must come back to simple facts. Yes, the Syrian crisis represents a threat to international peace and security. This threat is related to the repeated, organized and systematic use of chemical weapons by the Bashar Al-Assad regime, which once again reached new levels of horror with the two attacks perpetrated in Douma on 7 April last. Those attacks claimed the lives of at least several dozen people and wounded hundreds of others. Many of the injured will continue to suffer throughout their lives from the serious respiratory and neurological aftereffects of the chemicals used.

There is no doubt once again as to the responsibility of Damascus for this attack. The facts collected on the ground, the symptoms of the victims, the complexity of handling of the substances used, and the determination of the regime's forces to subjugate the last pockets of resistance in Douma as expeditiously as possible and using every means at their disposal, all point to this.

This is a well-known and documented modus operandi, given that an independent mechanism, created at the initiative of the Security Council, had already established at least four times since 2015 that chemical weapons had been used by the Damascus regime in Sarmin, Talmenes, Qmenas and Khan Shaykun — an investigative mechanism that a permanent member of the Security Council decided last November to force into silence.

The chemical-weapons policy of the Bashar Al-Assad regime is among the most serious violations of all the norms that guarantee our collective security. It is first and foremost a violation of all international obligations relating to the prohibition of chemical weapons under the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Syria is a party.

Secondly, it constitutes a violation of the very foundations of international humanitarian law, namely, the principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality.

Thirdly, it constitutes a breach of successive Security Council resolutions: resolutions 2118 (2013), 2209 (2015) and 2235 (2015) and therefore a breach of the obligations incumbent upon Syria under the Charter of the United Nations.

Lastly, the use of chemical weapons against civilians, which was banned in 1925 under the Geneva Protocol, constitutes a war crime under the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The Secretary-General in August 2013 called the use of chemical weapons a crime against humanity. That chemical war is a tool to accelerate a deliberate policy of submission by terror, which, in seven years, has caused the deaths of 400,000 people, the deliberate destruction of civilian and health infrastructure in entire regions, a massive exodus of refugees and displaced persons and has fuelled international terrorism. This frightening picture is that of one of the most blatant threats to international peace and security in the contemporary era. It is also the record of those who, against all odds, continue to support it.

I will once again have to state the obvious: if Syria has continued to use toxic substances for military purposes, it is because it has retained the capacity to use and manufacture them, in contravention of its international commitments, of the guarantees provided by Russia in the framework of the 2013 Russian-American agreement and of Security Council resolutions.

It has already been several years since the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) informed us of the major remaining doubts about the sincerity of Syria's initial declaration to the organization in 2013. Many of the OPCW's questions and requests for documents have gone unanswered. Syria has never provided a satisfactory explanation for the inspectors' discovery of substances and capabilities that Syria had never declared. We saw those capabilities again in action on 7 April, used to kill as many civilians as possible and terrorize the survivors to consolidate the definitive takeover of Douma by the Syrian regime.

Beyond Syria, the prevailing impunity since 2013 affects the entire chemical non-proliferation regime, and with it the entire security system that we have collectively built since the Second World War. It is that collective security legacy, built to protect future generations from the outbreaks of violence in the two global conflicts, that the members of the Security Council have been mandated to protect. To allow the normalization of the use of chemical weapons without reacting is to let the genie out of the bottle. That would be a terrible setback to international order, for which we would all pay the price.

The Security Council, to which the Charter of the United Nations entrusts the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security on behalf of the entire international community, is therefore more than justified in meeting today. It is more than justified for the Council to note, once again, the violation of international law and its own resolutions, and the persistence of a proven threat to international peace and security. It is more than justified to urgently re-establish a mechanism for attributing responsibility for chemical attacks — that opportunity was given to the Council in vain, once again, on Tuesday (see S/PV.8228) with the American draft resolution (S/2018/321).

The Council is more than justified in doing what it has committed itself to do, that is, to take measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. But in the face of the mass atrocities committed in Syria, the Council's action has been paralysed for several years by successive Russian vetoes. Russia vetoed 12 draft resolutions on Syria, including six on the chemical issue alone. Those vetoes had no other objective than to protect the Syrian authorities — to guarantee a regime of impunity, in defiance of all international standards. To allow the indefensible, Russia has deliberately chosen to sacrifice the ability of the Council to act, the most important tool of our collective security. We had proof of that again last Tuesday.

On 7 April, Douma joined Ypres, Halabja and Khan Shaykhun in the litany of chemical massacres. I solemnly say that, in deciding to once again use chemical weapons, the regime reached a point of no return on 7 April. France will assume its responsibility to put an end to an intolerable threat to our collective security and to finally ensure respect for international law and the measures taken for years by the Security Council.

A chemical attack like that of Douma, which consists in gassing the last inhabitants of a besieged enclave — even when it is about to fall, even when the last fighters are negotiating their surrender — is the height of cynicism. That is where we are after seven years of the regime's war against its people. This is the situation to which the world must provide a firm, united and resolute response. That is our responsibility today.

It will also be essential to combat impunity for those responsible for the use of such weapons and, more broadly, for those who are responsible for the most serious crimes committed in Syria. France is fully committed to that endeavour. That is the purpose of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, which we initiated last January. We will also continue to support and assist all international mechanisms in their work to investigate the most serious crimes committed against civilians in Syria.

In addition to the chemical issue, continuing violations of international humanitarian law must cease without delay. We ourselves demanded it by unanimously adopting resolution 2401 (2018) — thwarted the day after its adoption by the resumption of bombardments by the regime with the active support of its allies, including those within the Council who had subscribed to the truce. Resolution 2401 (2018) has lost none of its relevance, quite the contrary — full and unhindered humanitarian access to help populations in distress must be implemented throughout the territory. It is essential and urgent that humanitarian convoys can reach eastern Ghouta safely and that civilians fleeing hostilities or in need of medical treatment can be protected.

Finally, we can only sustainably resolve the Syrian crisis within the framework of a political solution and on the basis of the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). Only under those conditions can put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people, eradicate terrorism and work together for the stability of the Middle East. We have been calling for a political solution for seven years. May those who join us today in their concern about the consequences of the Syrian crisis finally force the regime to accept negotiations under the aegis of the United Nations.

We cannot allow the most fundamental values and standards of humanity, such as those emanating from the Charter of the United Nations, be thwarted and flouted in front of our eyes without reacting. Those values and standards must be defended and protected. That is the reason behind our commitment — to restore the complete ban on chemical weapons set in stone within international conventions, and thereby consolidate the rule of law. It is the responsibility of those who believe, like France, in effective multilateralism led by a respected United Nations.

We must stop the Syrian chemical escalation. We cannot allow a country to simultaneously defy the Council and international law. The ability of Damascus to violate all our norms constitutes a threat to international security. Let us put an end to it.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): The Secretary-General has presented a catalogue of danger in the Middle East, including Gaza, Yemen and Iraq. It is no disrespect to those issues that today, like other speakers, I will concentrate on Syria. The United Kingdom will be ready to put its shoulder to the wheel on those other issues when the time comes.

The situation we face today and the reason we are in the Security Council today arise wholly and solely from the use of chemical weapons on the Syrian people, most probably by the Syrian regime — not just once, but consistently and persistently over the past five years. The highest degree of responsibility, to quote the Russian Ambassador, is indeed what the Council, and in particular its five permanent members, are for, and it is our duty to uphold.

The British Cabinet met recently and concluded that the Al-Assad regime has a track record of the use of chemical weapons and that it is highly likely the regime is responsible for Saturday's attack. This is a further example of the erosion of international law in relation to the use of chemical weapons, as my French and American colleagues have set out, and it is deeply concerning. But more important than that, the use of chemical weapons cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. The British Cabinet has agreed on the need to take action to alleviate humanitarian distress and to deter the further use of chemical weapons by the Al-Assad regime. To that end, we will continue to work with our friends and allies to coordinate an international response.

The Secretary-General mentioned the Cold War. Of course, the Cold War was bracketed by East-West cooperation. We have been on the same side as Russia. In April 1945, Russia liberated Vienna as part of our joint efforts to bring peace to Europe. In 1995, it passed the Dayton Accords at part of our joint efforts to bring peace and stability to Bosnia and Herzegovina. But in 2018 the Russians refuse to work with us to bring peace to Syria.

Instead, since the first attack on Ghouta and chemical-weapons use, in 2013, the Joint Investigative Mechanism has ascribed two uses of mustard gas to Da'esh, three uses of chlorine to the Syrian regime and one use of sarin to the Syrian regime before the latest attack. As my French colleague has set out, the United Kingdom, the United States and France are members in good standing of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We are members and supporters of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its Fact-finding Mission. In the debates in the Security Council earlier this week, we would have dispatched an investigative mission, had Russia and Bolivia not blocked that effort (see S/PV.8228).

Syria is the latest pernicious chronology of Russia's disregard for international law and disrespect for the international institutions we have built together to keep us collectively safe. This is revealed in actions over Georgia 10 years ago, over Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17 and over the attack in Salisbury, which we will return to next week.

Let me repeat what I said in the Security Council last week. My Government and the British people are not Russophobic. We have no quarrel with the Russian people. We respect Russia as a country. We prefer a productive relationship with Russia, but it is Russia's own actions that have led to this situation.

What has taken place in Syria to date is in itself a violation of the United Nations Charter. No purpose or principle of the Charter is upheld or served by the use of chemical weapons on innocent civilians. On the contrary: to stand by and ignore the requirements of justice, accountability and the preservation of the non-proliferation regime is to place all our security — not just that of the Syrian people — at the mercy of a Russian veto. We will not sacrifice the international order we have collectively built to the Russian desire to protect its ally at all costs.

The Russian Ambassador set out what Russia is doing on the ground in Syria. He thought that might be inconvenient for me to hear. However, it is not inconvenient for me to point out that Russia has given $5.5 million to the United Nations appeal. The United Kingdom has given a $160 million, and this is part of a contribution totalling $3.5 billion in all. It is not inconvenient for me to say that; it may be inconvenient for the Russian Ambassador to hear it.

The Russian Ambassador also asked why we were not joining in and trying to stabilize actions in Syria and bring about peace. We have tried. Indeed, we have tried very hard to support Staffan de Mistura in getting the Geneva political process under way, and we shall continue to so. But we do not join Russia, because, sadly, its efforts have not been to try and restart the Geneva process. Instead, their efforts have been to support Syria in the use of chemical weapons and the

bombardment of the Syrian people. In the area known as I-4, they helped the regime liberate this area but they took their eye off the ball and Da'esh took it back. They took it again, but, sadly, foreign fighters have been able to re-establish themselves there. This is not de-escalation. This is not political progress. This is a gross distortion by Russia of what is actually happening on the ground.

The circumstances that we face today are truly exceptional. My colleagues from the United States and France have set out in great detail the catalogue of awful things that are happening to the Syrian people. That catalogue goes to the heart of what the Geneva Conventions, the non-proliferation regime, the United Nations and the Security Council are for. It is not only dangerous what Russia is doing in vetoing our resolutions and in supporting the Syrian regime's actions against its own people. It is ultimately prejudicial to our security. Indeed, it will let Da'esh re-establish itself. It is something that we believe we need to take action to defend.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing today, for his efforts and for his good offices.

Last weekend, reports once again began to emerge of horrifying allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, this time in Douma, with reports of a large number of civilian casualties. Like many others, we were alarmed by these extremely serious allegations, and we called for an immediate, impartial and thorough investigation to establish the facts. In that regard, we welcome the fact that the Fact-finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which we fully support, has been deployed to Syria. Full access and cooperation by all parties must now be ensured.

I want to reiterate once more that Sweden will spare no effort to combat the use and proliferation of chemical weapons by State or non-State actors anywhere in the world. We unequivocally condemn in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons, including in Syria. It is a serious violation of international law, it constitutes a threat to international peace and security, and their use in armed conflict is a war crime. The international disarmament and non-proliferation regime must be safeguarded, which is best achieved through true multilateralism and broad international consensus.

We share the outrage and the frustration of many in this Chamber about chemical-weapons use in Syria. Those responsible for such crimes must be held accountable. We cannot accept impunity.

The conflict in Syria is in its eighth year, and we are at a dangerous moment. We fully share the deep concern expressed by the Secretary-General about the risks of the current impasse and the need to avoid the situation escalating and spiralling out of control and to pay further attention to the divides, tensions and fault lines in the region, as described again by the Secretary-General this morning.

We remain deeply disappointed that the Security Council has been unable to agree and move forward on a substantial, swift, and unified response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We deeply regret that Russia once again used its veto and blocked the Council from taking action this week (see S/PV.8228). Over the past few days, we have tried to ensure that all peaceful means to respond have seriously been considered. We are working tirelessly to ensure that no stone is left unturned in efforts to find a way forward in the Security Council. The Secretary-General offered to support such efforts through his good offices, which is an opportunity that should be seized. That is why yesterday we circulated yet another proposal that asks for four things.

First, it condemns in the strongest terms any use of chemical weapons in Syria and expresses alarm at the alleged incident in Douma last weekend, because the use of chemical weapons constitutes a serious violation of international law.

Secondly, it demands full access and cooperation for the OPCW Fact-finding Mission, because we need facts and evidence about what happened in Douma last weekend.

Thirdly, it expresses the Council's determination to establish a new impartial, objective and independent attribution mechanism based on a proposal by the Secretary-General, because the perpetrators of chemical-weapons attacks must be identified and held to account, and, to that end, we need a new mechanism.

Fourthly, it requests the Secretary-General to dispatch immediately a high-level disarmament mission to Syria because we need to resolve all outstanding issues on chemical weapons and rid Syria once and for all possible chemical weapons that might still exist in

the country. Such a mission would add political and diplomatic leverage to the necessary technical and professional work of the OPCW. We therefore call on all members of the Council to muster the political will and respond to the appeal by the Secretary-General so as to come together and move forward.

The use of chemical weapons is a grave threat to international peace and security. It is indeed deplorable that the Council has not yet been able to come together and agree on a timely and firm response. Even though the use of chemical weapons in itself violates international law, any response must comply with international law and respect the Charter of the United Nations. The time has now come to urgently revert to a political process under United Nations auspices for a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015), and for Syria and the Astana guarantors to move forward without further delay and live up to their commitments so that resolution 2401 (2018), which demands the cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access, can be fully and urgently implemented. That is the only way to end to the suffering of the Syrian people and end the brutal seven-year-long conflict.

We firmly believe that there is a way for the Council to shoulder its responsibilities under the Charter. We believe that there continues to be a way for the Council to come together. We believe that we need to ensure that we have exhausted every peaceful effort and every diplomatic option to stop further atrocities from being carried out in Syria, hold those responsible to account, come to terms once with the chemical-weapons issue in Syria, cease hostilities and find a political solution.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, on behalf of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, I thank Secretary-General António Guterres for having illustrated for us the chaotic and dangerous situation currently prevailing in the Middle East by providing a detailed overview of every one of the conflicts in that vulnerable region, from Libya to the desolate and devastating crisis in Syria, which, as all evidence suggests, runs the imminent risk of dramatically deteriorating.

In line with the statement of the Secretary-General, we reaffirm Equatorial Guinea's firm belief that in confronting such situations we must always have recourse to dialogue and establish and respect mechanisms intended for achieving the peaceful settlement of conflicts until such options are exhausted. A unilateral military response could be counterproductive, and, far from solving the problem, it would lead to more suffering and chaos than already present, as the Secretary-General indicated — and additional disorder as in case of Libya, with which we are well familiar in Africa, and the consequences of which affect the entire Sahel region and part of Central Africa. We stand categorically against the use of force with the sole exception that it be justified under the conditions set forth under the Charter of the United Nations Charter and that it be used as a last resort after all other means have been exhausted.

We are concerned about the rhetoric that is being used. It sounds dangerously familiar to us, and we do not like where it might lead us. We appeal to Governments' sense of responsibility, and in particular to the permanent members of the Security Council, as we believe that they have the additional responsibility of defending the relevance of the Council.

We would like to ask the following questions. Who benefits from the inability of the Security Council to make decisions? Are we contributing to delegitimizing the Council? Are we actively eroding the Council's relevance in the international political arena? If the Council is unable to take action, how long will it take before the international community withdraws its faith, hope and trust in the Council?

There is no military solution to the Syrian issue. We must therefore continue to look for ways to solve the problem through diplomatic channels. All Council members must act responsibly and agree to establish an independent and impartial monitoring mechanism to ascertain what took place in Douma and ensure accountability and that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

The Secretary-General stated his disappointment with the Council's failure to establish a mechanism that would identify and attribute responsibility to those using chemical weapons. We could not agree more with that statement. Only a few days ago, our delegation stated its frustration when the Council failed to adopt three draft resolution put to the vote (see S/PV.8228). The Secretary-General's offer concerning his good offices must be considered, and we must provide him with that opportunity.

In conclusion, we reiterate the position of Equatorial Guinea in arguing against and condemning

the use of chemical weapons and other weapons of mass destruction regardless of who uses them.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Sir, for having convened this meeting. We welcome the presence of the Secretary-General among us. His assessments are always very precise and useful, and we thank him for the intensive work that he is doing for the benefit of upholding the purposes and principles of the Organization.

For some reason, some members of the Security Council are avoiding addressing the main reason for convening this meeting, which is that one State Member has threatened the unilateral use of force in violation of the Charter of the United Nations. Much has been said about the use of chemical weapons, and Bolivia would like to make clear its total and absolute condemnation of the use of chemical weapons or the use of chemical agents as weapons as unjustifiable and criminal acts wherever, whenever and by whomever they are committed. For their use is a grave crime under international law and against the interests of international peace and security. Those responsible for committing those terrible and criminal acts must be identified, investigated, prosecuted and punished. We demand a transparent and impartial investigation that must identify those responsible for any act of the use of chemical weapons.

Needless to say, it is essential that the Security Council ensures an independent, impartial, complete, conclusive and, above all, depoliticized investigation. We regret that the Security Council has as yet failed to achieve that objective. Nonetheless, we will support all work intended to accomplish that goal. It is crucial that the Council continue to discuss the issue of the use of chemical weapons, but I reiterate that what has brought us together at this meeting is the threat of one State Member' illegal use of force.

Over the past 72 years, humankind has built a framework that is not only physical or institutional, but also juridical. Humankind has setup instruments of international law intended precisely to prevent the most powerful from attacking the weakest with impunity so as to establish a balance in the world and prevent grave violations to international peace and security. We have built an international system — the Security Council is clear evidence of it — based on rules. It is the duty of the Council and of all the organs of the United Nations to respect those rules and defend multilateralism. The Charter of the United Nations, which prohibits unilateral action, must be upheld.

Another key detail to remember is that the Security Council is not representative of the five permanent members it comprises, nor of its 15 members seated around this table; rather, it represents the entire membership of 193 States, both the nations and their peoples. The Security Council must not be utilized as a sounding board for war propaganda nor interventionism. It should also not be made into a pawn to be sacrificed on the chessboard of war, geopolitics and petty interests.

We have heard many stories from history about the prohibition of chemical weapons, and Bolivia is an active participant in that system, but I would like to talk about the story of our Charter. When one is unsure about how to act under certain circumstances, I read that the best way to settle such uncertainty is to recall the principles of the French Revolution and reflect on where the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are upheld. Those principles form part of the genesis of the Charter. Another part comes from the Magna Carta, of course, which, for the first time in history, limited the exercise of power precisely to defend the weakest.

Another antecedent to the Charter is the Yalta Conference. I read that the Conference established the system of control and checks and balances, which is the Security Council with its five permanent members. Bolivia did not attend the Conference. As I understand it, just Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin were present. The outcome of the Conference was ratified at the San Francisco Conference a few months later in 1945. That is the system that we have agreed to uphold, which is why I believe that is essential to understand the principles of our Charter. Our Charter is not words on page, meant to hand out to tourists visiting the United Nations Headquarters, but rather a set of norms that we have agreed to comply with and uphold. Article 2 states that

> "The Organization and its Members, in pursuit of the Purposes stated in Article 1, shall act in accordance with the following Principles."

Principle 4 of Article 2 reads,

> "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of

any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."

That is to say that any use of force must be authorized by the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter. Any form of unilateral action therefore contravenes international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter.

Another point worth mentioning is that we have listened, with due respect, to our colleagues speak about the criminal use of chemical weapons, and we completely agree with them on that. However, it would be very dangerous to fight an alleged violation of international law with another violation of international law and the Charter. That is why, in this specific case, we hope that there is an independent, impartial, comprehensive and conclusive investigation.

Allow me to offer a clarification to my dear colleague from the United Kingdom. While Bolivia voted against one draft resolution, it voted in favour of two others. It voted against the one because, regrettably, this platform was being exploited for political motives. Draft resolutions are presented for nothing more than the spectacle of it, for the television cameras. Draft resolutions are presented knowing that they will be vetoed, and not all efforts are put forth to reach consensus, though that is what we normally do for resolutions.

We believe that this meeting is very important because we not only discussing an attack on a Member State, or the threat of a military strike against a Member State of the United Nations, whichever it may be, but rather because we are living at a time of constant attacks on multilateralism. Let us recall that the achievements in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change have been undermined. Let us recall that the gains reached with the Global Compact for Migration have been eroded. Let us recall that there is a clear policy and mindset of multilateralism subversion. What happens is that for some the discourse on human rights is used until it no longer serves their interests, and then they violate those rights.

My region is a witness to that. We endured Operation Condor, as it was called, during the 1970s, which was planned by the intelligence services of some Member States. When democracy did not suit them, they financed coups d'etat. When they were unhappy with the discourse on human rights, they infringed human rights. When the discourse of democracy was no longer enough, they were ready to finance coups d'etat. The use of unilateral practices leaves behind unhealed wounds, despite the passage of time.

Some of the members of the Council have spoken on the situation in Iraq and Libya, which I believe are some of the worst crimes that have been committed this century. The invasion of Iraq, with its dire consequences, left more than 1 million dead. The effects of the strikes against Libya and the regime-change policies imposed on it, which, as my colleague from Equatorial Guinea aptly said, they still feel, suffer and endure throughout the entire region of the Sahel and Central Africa. But no one wants to talk about the root causes of those conflicts, and no one will talk about the impunity enjoyed for those serious crimes. It warrants repeating. Those are the most serious crimes committed this century. We hope that all the members of the Security Council, given the high degree of responsibility we have — 10 of us elected by the membership and five enjoy the privilege to have a permanent seat on the Council with the power of veto — must lead by example for the rest of the membership on the fulfilment of the purposes and principles of the Charter.

By way of conclusion, I would like to reiterate what former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a similar situation in 2013: "The Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security". That is my appeal. Everything must be addressed within the framework of the Charter. The use of force is legal only in the exercise of the right to self-defence, in line with Article 51 of the Charter, or when the Security Council approves such action. That was the reason for the meeting, and Bolivia's position is to categorically condemn any threat or use of unilateral force.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would very much like to thank the Secretary-General for his valuable briefing today. We share his concern about the fact that the Middle East is experiencing crises and challenges that unquestionably represent threats to international peace and security. The situation will undoubtedly deteriorate if the Security Council resolutions are not implemented by the relevant parties.

The question of Palestine, the practices of the Israeli occupation there and its continued violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the relevant Security Council resolutions

are testament to that. The most recent is its repression of peaceful protests in Gaza and the use of excessive force. That led to the deaths of dozens of civilians and injuries to hundreds as they exercised their legitimate right to demonstrate peacefully in support of the March of Return. Kuwait condemns those Israeli practices in the strongest terms. We regret that the Security Council has not taken action to condemn such acts of repression or to call on the Israeli occupation forces to end them. The Israeli occupying Power should not be an exception. Everyone should respect and abide by international law and the Charter of the United Nations and should implement the relevant Security Council resolutions with the aim of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace that can fulfil the Palestinian people's legitimate political right to establish their own State on their own land, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We have had a number of meetings over the past few days. Today's meeting would not have taken place if we had been able to agree on a new mechanism to investigate the allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. This disagreement has led to deep divisions among the members of the Security Council. We must step up our efforts to advance the stalled political process in Syria. We have been concerned about escalating tensions among all parties since the beginning of the year. Through the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), which primarily calls for a cessation of hostilities throughout Syria for at least 30 days, we tried to improve the humanitarian situation. Unfortunately, however, it has not been implemented and has in fact been violated in flagrant disregard for the will of the international community.

We share the concern and disappointment of the Secretary-General about the deteriorating situation in Syria and the ongoing allegations of the use of chemical weapons, and support his call for an agreement on a new mechanism to ensure accountability and end impunity in Syria. We reiterate our support for the efforts of the Fact-finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to establish the facts surrounding the alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma, in eastern Ghouta, and emphasize that there must be accountability for the perpetrators of those crimes, if they are confirmed.

In view of our responsibility as members of the Council, we should do our utmost and not lose hope, and we should continue our efforts to agree on the establishment of an independent, impartial and professional mechanism for attributing responsibility and ensuring accountability. The continued violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2118 (2013), by the warring parties in Syria further convince us that, in the case of grave violations of human rights or crimes that amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity, there should be a moratorium on the use of the veto as a procedural matter, so that such tragedies for innocent civilians are not repeated.

The State of Kuwait takes a principled and firm position, in line with that of the League of Arab States. We call for preserving the unity, sovereignty and independence of Syria, as well as for a cessation of the violence and hostilities in order to put an end to bloodshed, protect the Syrian people and achieve a peaceful settlement. This would be done under the auspices of the United Nations and through the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Syria, based on the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015), with the aim of achieving a political transition agreed on by all sectors of Syrian society and of meeting their legitimate aspirations.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We join others in expressing our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his insightful briefing and personal presence at today's meeting. In our view, since his appointment as steward of this world Organization, he has ceaselessly promoted a very important approach, which is the use of amicable and preventive diplomacy.

Following an alert to the world, the Security Council underlined in its first presidential statement of 2018, on preventive diplomacy and sustaining peace (S/PRST/2018/1), adopted during Kazakhstan's presidency of the Security Council, that the ways to address conflict may include measures to rebuild trust by bringing Member States together around common goals. That has been particularly important in situations where international relations have featured confrontations and tension behind which the contours of a global war are increasingly apparent. We are right now in a moment when we must exercise special caution and vigilance in making decisions about our actions, especially in the Middle East. We believe that it is time to tap into all the tools available for a comprehensive strategy of preventive diplomacy in order to avoid the very serious consequences of any

military action that could have repercussions for global security and stability.

The recent escalation of the rhetoric on Syria and the threat of the use of unilateral actions has left the delegation of Kazakhstan deeply concerned about the unfolding situation, which has the potential to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security. We all bear a responsibility for complying with international law and order, and none of our countries has the right to violate the Charter of the United Nations or to act or threaten to act unilaterally with respect to a sovereign nation under any pretext, unless that is decided by the Security Council. The Security Council is a collective body and is designed to take balanced decisions with regard to the issues of peace and security. We can agree or disagree, but we are mandated to work together to achieve a decision for which we have to bear a collective responsibility.

Kazakhstan believes that the most effective way to prevent conflicts is to use diplomacy and mediation, not military means. We look forward to the next round of talks to be held in Geneva and in our capital, Astana, when the parties will address the stepping up of efforts to ensure observance of their respective agreements, among other issues.

In addressing the disputes over the issue of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma in Syria, which has provoked the most recent tension in international relations, we consider it necessary to state the following. Kazakhstan strongly condemns any use of chemical weapons, if confirmed. Impunity is not permissible. We should act resolutely to stop any further use of such inhuman weapons, but we should act on the basis of proven facts. In this particular case, where there are doubts about the actual use of a poisonous substance, Kazakhstan calls on the members of the Council to be patient, at least until the expert group of the Fact-finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to Syria is deployed to the site of the alleged attack and can report on the findings of its investigation, particularly given that yesterday we learned that the Syrian Government has granted visas for the OPCW investigators and pledged to facilitate access to the sites of the alleged chemical attack. We should first establish and understand the scientifically and professionally ascertained facts, after which the Council should decide on the appropriate line of action to take.

At this stage, any military action or threat of it without the prior approval of the Security Council is undesirable. It could have a long-lasting negative impact that would be very difficult to overcome and could result in unprecedented and unanticipated complications. Kazakhstan remains committed to the Charter of the United Nations and to all Security Council resolutions aimed at resolving the political and humanitarian aspects of the Syrian conflict. We believe it is crucial to exercise restraint and refrain from any rhetoric that might exacerbate the already fragile and volatile situation. Such a pause for reflection on the consequences is essential to preserving international peace and security.

In the light of the prevailing circumstances, it is more critical than ever that all Council members implement resolution 2401 (2018). The crisis in Syria can be resolved only through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process, based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex), subsequent Security Council resolutions and the relevant statements of the International Syria Support Group. Lastly, we fully endorse the views articulated by the Secretary-General on 11 April about the risks of the current impasse that we are witnessing today (see SG/SM/18984). We must at all costs avoid the situation spiralling out of control. Our ultimate goal should be to put an end to the horrific suffering of the Syrian people and to help them to move forward on a path of peace and progress.

Once again, this is an alarming moment, and we need to work together to restore unity and effectiveness in the Security Council by rebuilding trust and consensus in order to preserve global peace and security. We need cooperation within the Council to establish a workable attribution mechanism, which we passionately advocated today in this Chamber. Let us make it happen and transform our words into real deeds. The delegation of Kazakhstan is ready for that and calls on its colleagues to go the extra mile in that direction.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and deeply appreciate his efforts to weigh in on the grave challenge that we are facing, in order to ensure that what should and must be avoided will not happen because of miscalculation or a lack of thoughtfulness or of appreciation for the tremendous responsibility that the Security Council, especially its permanent members, bears. The Cold War is back with a vengeance, the Secretary-General said, but this time, he went on to tell us, in a less managed

manner. It is difficult to quarrel with him. His approach was quite comprehensive, focusing, as he said, on the multiplicity of dangerous conflicts that the Middle East is facing. While his approach may be better, I choose to focus on Syria because it is the current flashpoint.

Following the alleged chemical attacks in Douma, it is regrettable that the Council was not able to adopt a resolution to create an independent, impartial and professional investigative mechanism for identifying those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. This is a problem that has been with us for some time and a reality that sadly reflects the lack of unity in the Council even on matters that are manifestly in the common interest of all. We certainly welcome the deployment of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-finding Mission to Syria to establish the facts surrounding the alleged use of chemicals as weapons. We have repeatedly stated that using chemicals as weapons is inhumane, and we condemn their use by any actor under any circumstances. One matter remains, and that is establishing a mechanism for attribution. We hope that will be done as soon as possible, but that does not mean that in the meantime we should cease to exercise maximum restraint in the interests of peace.

Right now, pragmatic considerations and simple rational calculation suggest that we must get our priorities right. We need to continue to live if we are to be able to fight evil. We have continued to express our deep concern about the current dynamics in Syria and their devastating implications for regional and international peace and security. We fully concur with the Secretary-General, who stressed in his statement of 11 April that it is vital to ensure that the situation does not spiral out of control (see SG/SM/18984). He stressed that legitimate concern again today. The Security Council, as the principal body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, should not and cannot allow that to happen. At a time when we are talking about preventive diplomacy — as well as after appointing a Secretary-General who told us, in his maiden speech to the Council (see S/PV.7857), that prevention is not merely a priority, but the priority — now is the time for the United Nations to undertake the search for diplomacy for peace in earnest. If we are seriously committed to moving our Organization from a culture of reaction to one of prevention, now is the time to stand firm, speak with one voice and take proactive and collective action that can be respected by all major stakeholders.

That requires the Council to be united for global peace and security. We know that is difficult, but we believe that we have no other sane option. This is the time for the Security Council to stand up and be counted. The Security Council is the custodian of the Charter of the United Nations, which, growing out of the devastation of the Second World War, promised to save succeeding generations from that scourge. That is a clarion call the Council should heed and act on. The situation should not be allowed to spiral out of control. The Secretary-General is right and the Council should listen to him.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): We thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and insightful briefing. His statement rightly focused on the broader Middle East. However, I will focus on the most pressing issue at hand, the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The Charter of the United Nations starts with the words "We the peoples of the United Nations", and while the Russian Federation is blocking the Council from taking effective action on the crimes of Russia's ally Syria, all peoples of every nation are outraged by the continued unrestrained violence that the Syrian regime has unleashed against its own people. As the Secretary-General just said, the people of Syria have lived through a litany of horrors. No responsible Government can ignore the universal outrage that those horrors have provoked.

Our collective incapacity in the Council to stop the crimes in Syria should weigh heavily on the conscience of all our members, but on the conscience of one permanent member in particular. It was our collective conscience that created the Charter of the United Nations. It was our collective conscience that created the Chemical Weapons Convention. The use of chemical weapons is unlawful in and of itself. It is a violation of the Charter of the United Nations. It is a serious violation of international law and may constitute a war crime and a crime against humanity.

We strongly believe that the international community must fully uphold the standard that the use of chemical weapons is never permissible. As the Secretary-General just said, the norm against the use of chemical weapons must be upheld. The non-proliferation regime must be upheld. Accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria is therefore neither optional

nor negotiable. The images of last weekend's attack in Douma are appalling. Atrocities have once again been inflicted on Syria's civilian population. Once again, dozens of innocent civilians have been killed and hundreds injured. The Kingdom of the Netherlands believes that it is highly likely that the Syrian regime is responsible for the attack. It has a proven history of such attacks, having used chemicals as a weapon against its own people in 2014, 2015 and 2017. It is unacceptable that four years after Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, its declarations can still not be verified as accurate or complete.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is a long-time supporter of fighting impunity when it comes to chemical weapons. Regrettably, all attempts to achieve accountability in the Council have failed. Referral to the International Criminal Court was vetoed. The renewal of the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) was also vetoed. This week, accountability was again vetoed. With its vetoes, the Russian Federation has assumed much responsibility for the crimes committed by the Syrian regime. The draft resolution for a new accountability mechanism that was vetoed this week remains the bare minimum of what is acceptable to the Kingdom of the Netherlands. We will not settle for anything less than an independent, impartial attribution mechanism that can ensure that the culprits of that vicious attack will be identified and held accountable.

No veto can wipe from our memory the clear findings presented by the JIM on the use of chemical weapons by the Al-Assad regime and Da'esh. No veto can stop our compassion for the victims of the chemical-weapon attack last weekend. No veto can end our determination to achieve justice for the victims and for the people of Syria as a whole.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands remains committed to fighting impunity. We reiterate our strong support for an international, impartial and independent mechanism, the Commission of Inquiry, the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons and a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, as the most appropriate path to accountability and justice. At the heart of our policy on Syria is a deep desire for peace and justice for its people. Impunity cannot and will not prevail.

Let me end with warm words of appreciation to the Secretary-General and his tireless efforts for justice and the international legal order.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing and to assure him of our full support in finding a political solution to all conflicts, not just the one in Syria.

Since we are discussing the situation in the Middle East and in particular the current situation in Syria, let me begin with a very sad observation. Even with our unanimously adopted resolutions, such as resolution 2401 (2018), we are still not seeing any substantial change on the ground. The fighting is far from being over and the human suffering is tremendous. Taking into consideration the current situation and the growing risk of the loss of human life owing simply to a lack of food or medicine, we should try to do our utmost to find possible ways to ensure that life-saving aid convoys can reach those in need. Unfortunately, that applies not only to eastern Ghouta but also to Idlib and Aleppo provinces. We must find a way to alleviate the suffering of ordinary Syrians. The civilian population in Syria has already suffered too much.

International public opinion is watching our meetings and sees our lack of agreement on the most basic principles under international humanitarian law. The Council bears enormous responsibility and will be held accountable for its actions. We therefore call on the Council to take the necessary steps to ensure that all the parties to the conflict, especially the regime and its allies, implement the ceasefire, enable humanitarian access and medical evacuations and fully engage in the United Nations-led talks in Geneva, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), which represent the best path to peace.

With regard to the issue of chemical weapons, a century ago that was a normal way to wage war. Just recently we commemorated the hundredth anniversary of the first use of chemical weapons, on the Western and Eastern fronts of the First World War alike. French, British, American and other Allied soldiers were targeted with chlorine in Ypres, while Russian soldiers were dying from the same gruesome weapons in Bolimów, now part of Polish territory. Now, a century later, we are being challenged by these ghastly weapons yet again. Our nations are seeing the effects of the same

toxic gas through the images of civilians who sought refuge in basements in Ghouta and other areas in Syria.

Chemical weapons were banned when the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) cam into effect in 1997. We had begun a new chapter in the history of non-proliferation and disarmament. All of us in this Chamber agree that the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere is deplorable and unacceptable. Can we really allow the success story of the CWC to be reversed? Will the Security Council allow the vision of a world free of chemical weapons to be destroyed? It is regrettable that the establishment of an independent, impartial investigative mechanism on the use of chemical weapons in Syria was vetoed on Tuesday (see S/PV.8228), thereby enabling those responsible for chemical attacks to remain unpunished. Accountability for such acts is a requirement under international law and is central to achieving durable peace in Syria. As members of the Security Council, we must find a way to reach agreement on how to properly respond to chemical attacks in Syria. We hope to see the Fact-finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) deployed to Douma as soon as possible. We reiterate our appreciation to the Director-General and staff of the OPCW for their commitment to its goals and work, often in particularly challenging circumstances.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Côte d'Ivoire thanks Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing on new developments in the critical situation in several countries in the Middle East, in particular Syria, since the Security Council considered the issue on 9 and 10 April *(see S/PV. 8225 and S/PV. 8228)*.

Despite the relative lull in the fighting in Syria, the humanitarian situation remains troubling in the light of the allegations of the recurring use of chemical weapons by parties to the conflict. As a result of its internal divisions, despite our goodwill, the Council has failed to ensure the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), which we adopted unanimously in order to deliver humanitarian assistance to people in need. In the light of the continuing reports of the use of chemical weapons in Douma, the Council was unable to reach an agreement on a statement that at the very least would have conveyed our solidarity to the Syrian people at this difficult time. The delegation of Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned by the current impasse in the Security Council, which has, unfortunately, prevented it from reaching agreement on a mechanism to combat impunity vis-à-vis the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

In this context, we reiterate our support for the impartial, transparent, independent investigation to be conducted by the Fact-finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons with the aim of shedding light on allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Douma, in eastern Ghouta.

Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its strong condemnation of any use of chemical weapons, by any party, during peacetime or during wartime. Once again we beseech members of the Council to unite so as to set aside their differences and successfully set up an accountability mechanism to ensure that those who use chemical weapons are held accountable.

We remain alarmed by the tensions stemming from the current political impasse, and we encourage the Secretary-General to make use of his good offices with stakeholders to restore peace and calm, in order to prevent any further escalation of the situation. To that end, my country invites all parties to exercise restraint so as to peacefully resolve this issue and in so doing safeguard international peace and security, which is our shared legacy.

Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms our conviction and our principled position that there can be no military response to the crisis in Syria. The solution needs to be sought through dialogue and an inclusive political process, as stipulated in the road map set out by resolution 2254 (2015). My country remains convinced that dialogue alone will lead us to an equitable settlement of the conflict in Syria.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make statement in my capacity as the representative of Peru.

We would like to express our gratitude for the briefing by Secretary-General António Guterres and to thank him for his willingness to help to achieve a solution to the impasse in which the Security Council currently finds itself. We encourage him to continue to spare no effort in this respect, in line with the prerogatives conferred upon him by the Charter of the United Nations.

Peru expresses its deep-rooted concern at the divisions that have emerged in the Council, in particular between its permanent members, and at the regrettable use of the veto, which limits our capacity to maintain

international peace and security and to resolve the humanitarian conflicts and crises that form our agenda.

We note with alarm the fact that the conflict in Syria continues to involve atrocity crimes committed with impunity and that it has deteriorated into a serious threat to regional and global stability, to the point where it is giving rise to serious tensions.

With respect to reports of the further use of chemical weapons in Douma, we believe it necessary to resume, as a matter of urgency and in a renewed spirit of compromise, negotiations that will lead to ensuring full access, as required, for the Fact-finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which is being deployed in Syria to determine what happened; and to create a dedicated, independent, objective and impartial mechanism to attribute responsibility.

On that understanding, we believe it important to recall once again that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict and that any response to the barbaric events taking place in that country must be in keeping with the norms of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

We recall also that in its resolution 2401 (2018), the Council ordered a humanitarian ceasefire throughout the entire Syrian territory, and that it is urgent to make headway in the political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

As the Secretary-General himself said, of particular concern is the potential threat posed by the current deadlock. We must at all costs prevent the situation from spiralling out of control. This must not occur given that our duty is to put an end to the suffering of millions of people and to impunity for atrocity crimes.

Peru reiterates its commitment to living up to the lofty responsibility that the maintenance of international peace and security entails. My delegation will continue to work towards a solution to the conflict and protect the Syrian people, in keeping with the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I would like to recall the statement by the President of the Security Council contained in document S/2017/507, on the length of interventions.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I should like, on behalf of my Government, to express our condolences to the people and the Government of Algeria in connection with the tragic military plane crash that claimed the lives of 247 passengers.

Secondly, I welcome the participation of the Secretary-General in this very important meeting. I thank him for his comprehensive and accurate briefing, which made clear that he and others in the Council did in fact understand this meeting's agenda item. He spoke in a manner commensurate with the threats to international peace and security posed by the allegations and accusations against my country and its allies.

My colleague the Ambassador of Sweden said that the use of chemical weapons is a war crime. This is true. I agree with him, as does my Government. However, I would ask him whether he believes that war in itself is a crime and needs to be stopped and prevented. Perhaps this would be a very good title for a book by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, and perhaps this would make clear to Member States that war in itself is a crime.

My colleague the representative of the United States said that the Syrian chemical weapons that killed civilians had been used 50 times; that is what she said. Chemical weapons were used 50 times and killed 200 civilians. Imagine that — the Syrian Government reversed the course of the global terrorist war against my country by killing only 200 civilians after having used chemical weapons 50 times. Are these not the words of amateurs? This is a scenario for DC Comics' *Superman* series. Is that how the White House strategists think — that a certain Government has used chemical weapons 50 times to kill 200 civilians? How is that logical?

My American colleague overlooked one important detail — that her country, on board the *MV Cape Ray*, destroyed the Syrian chemical stockpiles in the Mediterranean, along with ships from Denmark and Norway. How could it be that the experts in the United States delegation did not tell her that Ms. Sigrid Kaag told the Security Council in June 2014 that there were no more chemical stockpiles in Syria. Could they have simply forgotten all of that?

Some believe that the massive western military forces in the eastern Mediterranean are due to a Sufi Western affection for a handful of terrorist yobs in

Douma. By the way, those yobs were chased out to the North, as the Council is aware. They are now on their way to Saudi Arabia and thence to Yemen. They will be recycled and used on other fronts, including Yemen. No, the massive military forces in the Mediterranean do not target that handful of terrorists. They target the State of Syria and its allies. That should be the topic discussed today in this meeting.

My colleague the American Ambassador was not horrified that her country used 20 million gallons of Agent Orange in Viet Nam in 1961, killing and injuring 3 million Vietnamese. Four hundred thousand children are born with deformities every year due to the use of Agent Orange at that time. She was not horrified by her country's forces killing thousands of Syrians in Raqqa and thousands of Iraqis in Fallujah and Mosul through the use of white phosphorus, which is a chemical weapon. I ask my colleague, the Ambassador of Sweden: Is that not a war crime?

I would like to read a remark of the former Defence Minister of Britain, Mr. Doug Henderson. He spoke of the use by his country and the United States of white phosphorus in Iraq. I would ask my friend the British Ambassador to listen to this. Mr. Henderson said that it was unbelievable that the United Kingdom would occupy a country — meaning Iraq — to look for chemical weapons and at the same time use chemical weapons against that very same country.

George Orwell, the well-respected and ethical Western author said: "In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act". The truth that needs to be told today is that three permanent members of the Security Council are dragging the entire world once again towards the abyss of war and aggression. They seek to obstruct the Council's work in maintaining international peace and security, which is the main principle agreed upon and endorsed by our founding fathers when they adopted the Charter of the United Nations in San Francisco on 26 June, 1945. Even though my colleague, the Ambassador of Bolivia has already read it out, I would like to once again remind the Council of paragraph 4 of Article 2 of the Charter:

> "All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations".

The truth that needs to be told today is that those three States have a legacy based on fallacies and fabricated narratives in order to launch wars, occupy States, control their resources and change their governing systems. The truth that needs to be told today is that the entire world and the Council stand witnesses to the invasion, occupation and destruction of Iraq based on a United States lie in this very Chamber 14 years ago. They stand witnesses to France's exploitation of the Council to destroy Libya under the pretext of protecting civilians while ending the future of an entire people for the very simple reason that its President at the time, Mr. Sarkozy, wanted a cover up for his financial corruption. This is an ongoing case, of which members are all aware. However, some countries still fall for those lies promoted by those very same States in order to attack my country, Syria.

God bless the days when France the policies of Charles de Gaulle in the Council followed and repudiated the aggression of the United States and Britain against Iraq. We yearn for those days. France no longer respects the policies of Charles de Gaulle and is now one of the countries that launch attacks against other countries.

The truth that needs to be told today is that the international community has not sought to rein in those who are reckless and undermine international relations, subjecting them to disaster time and again since the establishment of this international Organization. Our biggest fear is that if the international community does not come together to end the abuse of those who are reckless, then the Organization will die in circumstances very similar to that which led to the death of the League of Nations.

The truth that needs to be told today is that after the failure of the United States, Britain, France and their proxies in our region to achieve their objectives in Syria through providing all forms of support to the armed terrorist groups, we see them today tweeting and bragging about their nice, new and smart rockets, and defying international legitimacy from the Council Chamber. They dispatch war planes and fleets to achieve what their terrorists have failed to achieve over the past seven years.

The truth that needs to be told today is that the Syrian Government liberated hundreds of thousands of civilians in eastern Ghouta from the practices of armed terrorist groups that used them as human shields, held

them hostage for years and prevented any medical or food assistance from reaching them. The terrorist groups used the schools, homes and hospitals of those civilians as military bases to launch attacks on 8 million civilians in Damascus.

The truth that needs to be told today is that some reckless people are pushing international relations towards the abyss based on a fake video prepared by the terrorist White Helmets, pursuant to instructions by Western intelligence.

The truth that needs to be told today is that the so-called international alliance used its war planes to serve Da'esh in order to block the victory of the Syrian Arab Army and its allies against that terrorist organization. That international alliance made the White Helmets its media division to fabricate and falsify incidents in order to benefit the Al-Qaida terrorist organization.

The government of my country took the initiative to invite the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to dispatch its Fact-finding Mission to visit Syria and the alleged site of the incident in Douma. The Government of my country has provided all the facilitation needed for the team to work in a transparent and accurate manner. The team is supposed to start its work in a few hours. This invitation was issued out of strength, confidence and diplomatic experience, not because we are weak or afraid and giving in to bullying or threats.

The Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms the Governments of these three States for launching their threats to use power in a flagrant violation of Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations, which identifies the primary purpose of the United Nations as the maintenance of international peace and security and the suppression of acts of aggression and other breaches to peace.

With the exception of the United States, Britain and France, we all understand that the Security Council is the organ charged with the maintenance of international peace and security and should stand against attempts to impose the law of the jungle and the rule of the powerful. However, some Member States think that the United Nations is just a private business company that works on the basis of pecuniary interests, market rules and the principle of supply and demand to determine the fate of peoples and States, and that use it as a platform for cheap theatrics and the dissemination of lies. This is the truth that disappoints the hopes and aspirations of the peoples of the world.

I am not reinventing the wheel in this Chamber. The history of our relations with those States is filled with agony, pain and bitterness as a result of their very well-known policies of aggression. Another more important and shocking truth that should be told today is that the silence of the majority with respect to those aggressive policies does not constitute collusion with these States, but it does arise from fear of their arrogance and political blackmail, economic pressure and aggressive record. Those States do not blink when they go after anyone who is telling the truth.

In conclusion, if those three States — the United States, Britain and France — think they can attack us and undermine our sovereignty and set out to do so, we would have no other choice but to apply Article 51 of the Charter, which gives us the legitimate right to defend ourselves. This is not a threat the way they do; it is a promise. This is a promise. We will not let anyone attack our sovereignty.

Why do I say that this is a promise? I say this because a thought commonly ascribed to the great United States leader George Washington, who lived more than 200 years ago comes to mind — the sound that is louder than that of the cannons is the sound of the truth that emanates from the heart of a united nation that wants to live free. We in Syria also have leaders and prominent figures as great as George Washington. They are doing the same thing for Syria — protecting the unity and sovereignty of their country.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.